

Fatos Kongoli.
Ëndrra e Damokleut. Roman [The Dream of Damocles]
Tirana. Çabej MÇM. 2001. 188 pp. ISBN 99927-33-24-1

Le rêve de Damoclès. Tr. Edmond Tupja.
Paris. Rivages. 2002. 280 pp. ISBN 2-7436-0949-4. 19.95 €.

Fatos Kongoli published little under the communist dictatorship, preferring a politically safer career as a teacher of mathematics. Soon after the Stalinist system imploded, however, he announced his plans for a literary tetralogy, a quartet of novels. Three volumes of this tetralogy have appeared and have enjoyed noted success, both in the Albanian original and in French translation. *I humburi*, Tirana 1992 / *Le paumé*, Paris 1997 (see WLT 71.4, p. 842-843), was the story of a loser, incapable of action, of escaping and of living at the time when the floodgates of communist Albania were first opened; *Kufoma*, Tirana 1994 / *L'ombre de l'autre*, Paris 1998 (see WLT 73.1, p. 189-190), was the tale of another tragic protagonist caught up in the inhumane machinery of the last decade of the Stalinist dictatorship; and *Dragoi i fildishtë*, Tirana 1999 / *Le dragon d'ivoire*, Paris 1999 (see WLT 75.1, p. 186), chronologically the first, focused on the life of an Albanian student in China in the 1960s. It is thus with exceptional interest that we greet the fourth, and apparently last installment of this ambitious project.

'The Dream of Damocles' begins with a suicide, that of the protagonist R.G., in the autumn of 1997. A student in Tirana, R.G. had lived with his father and worked at the 'Pacifik' bar. There he meets Linda, a painter from a formerly ruling family, with whom he falls madly in love. But, just as under the dictatorship, when falling in love and marrying someone from a clan with less than perfect communist credentials could jeopardize the well-being of a whole family, so is R.G. ostracized for his love of a girl from the former communist elite. Banished by his father because of the liaison, R.G. plunges into sorrow, delirium and folly, a descent which Kongoli chronicles masterfully. R.G. becomes the victim of hallucinations, believing himself to be persecuted by the figure of Damocles. His tragic destiny mirrors that of Albania, plunged as it was into chaos and folly in the wake of the political uprising of March 1997.

In all of his novels, Fatos Kongoli is acutely aware of the bitter course of his country's recent history. The Albanians have gone through unimaginable torment, even since the collapse of the little red cardhouse built by the Stalinists, and it is no surprise that his protagonists find it impossible to extract themselves from the ruins and get on with their lives. It is precisely this type of suffering that seems to bring noted works of literature to the fore.

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